DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 884 RC 021 438

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TITLE A Collaborative Program To Prepare Mainstream Teachers: Using Peer Supervision by General and Special Educators.

PUB DATE 1998-03-00

NOTE 9p.; In: Coming Together: Preparing for Rural Special Education in the 21st Century. Conference Proceedings of the American Council on Rural Special Education (18th, Charleston, SC, March 25-28, 1998); see RC 021 434.

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Extension Education; Higher Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; Mainstreaming; Peer Evaluation; Practicum Supervision; *Practicums; *Program Design; Program Evaluation; Rural Education; *Special Education; Teacher Certification; *Teacher Education Programs

IDENTIFIERS *Peer Supervision; West Virginia; *West Virginia University

ABSTRACT

As increasing numbers of students with disabilities are placed in regular classrooms, the shortage of rural special educators means that many rural classroom teachers are the primary providers of individualized programming to meet special needs. Since 1994, West Virginia University has been expanding its existing teacher education programs to serve a new and growing population: regular educators seeking additional endorsement in special education. In the Mainstream Practicum Project, these professional personnel (who already have appropriate credentials in elementary or secondary education) will complete all requirements for state teaching certification in one or more areas of special education (and a Master's degree, if desired) via coursework delivered at off-campus centers, plus on-the-job supervision of practicum experiences in their own classroom. Practicum supervision is provided through collaborative peer supervision involving a regular-education cooperating teacher, a special-education cooperating teacher, and a university supervisor. This paper provides a detailed outline of the design of the Mainstream Practicum Project, including project goals and objectives; teacher competencies; program development and delivery (modification of eligibility criteria for practicum participants and supervisors, redesign of practicum procedures and materials, delivery of coursework and practicum experiences); project evaluation plan for formative and summative evaluations; and project integration into the existing special education program. Contains 25 references. (SV)

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A COLLABORATIVE PROGRAM TO PREPARE MAINSTREAM TEACHERS: USING PEER SUPERVISION BY GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATORS

The Regular Education Initiative and the Full Inclusion Movement have resulted in the placement of increasing numbers of students with disabilities in regular classrooms. In many rural schools, shortages of special educators mean that the services of special educators may only be available on an itinerant or consultant basis; consequently, the classroom teacher may become the primary provider of individualized programming to meet special needs. From 1994 to 1998, the Special Education Program at West Virginia University was awarded federal personnel preparation funds to develop, implement, and evaluate the Mainstream Practicum Project, a program to assist regular educators currently working in mainstreaming programs in rural areas of the state of West Virginia to earn full qualifications in one or more areas of special education specialization. The project has enabled West Virginia University to expand its existing program to serve a new and growing preservice population: regular educators seeking additional endorsement in special education. These professional personnel (who already have appropriate credentials in either elementary or secondary education) will complete all requirements for state teaching certification in one or more areas of special education (and a Master's degree if desired) via coursework delivered at off-campus centers, plus on-the-job supervision of practicum experiences in their own integrated classrooms. Upon completion of their program of studies, these individuals are fully trained and qualified to deliver state-of-the-art educational services to students with special needs who are placed in regular classrooms in rural schools. The Mainstream Practicum Project was designed both to address the supply/demand imbalance by increasing the number of educational personnel certified in special education as well as to improve the quality of regular education personnel working in mainstream settings by (1) recruiting regular educators from rural areas of West Virginia into field-based graduate certification and degree programs in special education; (2) adapting the practicum service delivery model of the existing training programs in Mental Retardation, Learning Disabilities, and Behavior Disorders at West Virginia University to include a mainstream practicum model; and (3) increasing the pool of available educators trained and dually certified in regular and special education.

Need for Trained and Qualified Personnel

Current employment practices influence both the adequate supply of qualified special educators and the quality of educational programming provided to pupils. Many untrained teachers are hired to staff special education programs on out-of-field authorizations, temporary permits, or waivers (ASCUS, 1996). The demands of teaching special education often lead to stress and "burnout". Such attrition may be particularly severe for rural educators (O'Connor & Rotatori, 1987; Reetz, 1988). Untrained, highly stressed teachers are unlikely to deliver adequate or appropriate instruction to students, and they are very likely to leave their teaching positions (Greer & Greer, 1992). These circumstances have led to a serious shortage of special education personnel, a problem that is at its worst in rural areas.

In 1987, the federal government gave priority consideration to REI programs to strengthen the role of the regular education system in serving pupils with special needs. Since that time ever increasing numbers of pupils with mild-to-moderate (and sometimes even severe) learning and behavior disorders have been placed in regular classes, most often at the elementary level. This has been an especially attractive option for rural schools, where severe shortages of fully trained

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special education personnel have forced regular educators to supply many of the special services needed by pupils with learning and behavior disorders (DePaepe & Walega, 1990; Zeph, 1990). To date, only a few experimental teacher education programs have undertaken the challenge of jointly preparing regular and special educators to work collaboratively in integrated schools (Bornfield, Dembinski, & Myles, 1991; Feden & Clabugh, 1986). Nevertheless, a number of authorities have predicted that current developments will lead inevitably to full inclusion by the year 2000 (Davila, 1991; Ludlow & Lombardi, 1992; Smith-Davis, 1991). A recent survey of 137 leaders in the field of special education revealed that most professionals believe that special education will become a support system (rather than an alternative system) to regular education, which will take on primary responsibility for serving pupils with special needs (Hales & Carlson, 1992). Thus, the need for appropriately trained regular educators will continue to grow.

In response to these developments, many state education agencies now have reorganized pupil placement options to rely more heavily on the regular classroom as the primary placement. These policies and practices require special educators and regular educators alike to retool to gain the appropriate skills to work effectively in this context. By and large, regular education teachers have been poorly prepared to address the individual needs of pupils with specific learning and behavior problems (Billingsley & Cross, 1991a; Wilson & Silverman, 1991). In addition, they frequently express negative or anxious attitudes about their ability to teach exceptional learners effectively, as well as the effects of mainstreaming on the educational progress of average learners in the class (Aksamit, 1990; Phillips, Allred, Brulle, & Shank, 1990). The few and widely scattered undergraduate preparation programs that seek to prepare regular educators for their mainstreamimg tasks cannot address the training needs of all current elementary and secondary teachers, most of whom have had little or no training or practice related to special education (Brady, Bornfield, & Ilmer, 1991; Calder, 1990). Only a handful of teacher education programs to date have undertaken to retrain regular educators in special education (Billingsley & Cross, 1991b; King, Sears, Rosenberg, & Fagen, 1992); such models, however, have been recommended as possible solutions to address teacher shortages in rural areas by recruiting individuals already established in and/orcommitted to the school system and locale. Peer supervision has been recognized as an integral component of most successful on-the-job teacher training programs (Maynard & Furlong, 1993; McDavid, 1991). Collaboration and collegiality also are hallmarks of effective supervision to promote professional development among special educators (Kozleski, Sands, & French, 1993; Lane & Canosa, 1995).

In West Virginia, as in other places around the country, this situation has led to some problematic personnel practices. State policies and regulations currently permit, indeed, encourage placement of pupils with mild-to-moderate learning and behavior disorders in the regular classroom. A survey of school systems in West Virginia in summer 1993 revealed that several thousand regular educators are presently involved in some aspect of mainstreaming, and that future years will see a significant increase in this practice (Wienke & Ludlow, 1993). Nearly 70% of the administrators responding stated that all regular educators should have additional endorsement in special education, while the remaining 30% felt that teachers needed only inservice training. Many special educators who already have elementary or secondary education credentials have been transferred to regular classrooms where they now serve in the dual capacity as both regular and special educator serving pupils with special needs. Some school systems also have required regular educators to obtain additional endorsement in special education as greater numbers of such pupils have been placed in their classrooms. This practice puts considerable pressure on practicing teachers to enroll in a new preservice program to acquire these additional competencies, precisely at a time when it is impossible for them to give up their teaching positions and financial security as well as when it it is undesirable to remove them, if only temporarily, from service. The Mainstream Practicum Project at West Virginia University was specifically designed to enable elementary and secondary teachers to acquire additional certification in special education while working in the regular classroom setting through a collaborative peer supervision model.

Project Goals and Objectives

The project was designed to accomplish the following goals and objectives:

Goal 1: to design and field-test procedures and materials to develop rural mainstream teaching competencies in practicum students and regular/special education supervisory personnel

- Objective 1.1: to identify rural mainstream teaching competencies to be developed through the practicum experience
- Objective 1.2: to revise existing practicum procedures and materials to incorporate rural mainstream teaching competencies
- Objective 1.3: to revise existing supervisory personnel training procedures and materials to develop skills for promoting mainstream teaching by practicum students in regular /special education cooperating teachers and university supervisors
- Objective 1.4: to design and implement a pre-practicum seminar to refine rural mainstream teaching competencies in prospective practicum students
- Objective 1.5: to evaluate effectiveness of all procedures and materials in developing rural mainstream teaching competencies
- Objective 1.6: to disseminate rural mainstream teaching competencies, along with procedures and materials for developing them in practicum experiences

Goal 2: to design, implement, and evaluate a mainstream practicum model that uses field and university-based personnel to provide supervision to preservice students in on-the-job practicum experiences in rural regular education settings.

- Objective 2.1: to develop a service delivery model for a mainstream practicum model to be added to existing practicum options
- Objective 2.2: to offer the mainstream practicum model to students in the Fall and Spring academic semesters
- Objective 2.3: to evaluate the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of the mainstream practicum model
- Objective 2.4: to disseminate the procedures, materials, and effects of the mainstream practicum model

Goal 3: to increase the supply, quality, and retention rate of dually certified regular/special education personnel qualified to serve pupils with mild-to-moderate learning and behavior problems in rural regular classrooms in West Virginia

- Objective 3.1: to prepare a pool of teachers by the end of the four (4) year project period with dual certification in regular and special education
- Objective 3.2: to assess employment and retention patterns of project trainees to determine their service to pupils with disabilities in rural areas

Project Competencies

The existing certification programs in Mental Retardation, Learning Disabilities, and Behavior Disorders require completion of 12 hours of core courses plus six (6) hours of specialized courses and a 3-6 hour practicum experience in each area; students must complete 9-12 additional credits of required and elective coursework to earn a Master's degree. Existing practicum requirements specify that students must demonstrate fifty (50) program competencies, which are clustered into skills in four domains: preteaching skills, teaching skills, postteaching skills, and other professional skills. A listing of competencies, suggested validation activities, and procedures for documenting competency demonstration is included in the Practicum Handbook. In cooperation with the cooperating teacher and university supervisor, the practicum student reviews program competencies and develops a plan outlining activities to demonstrate them. Supervisory personnel validate the student's demonstration of all competencies, and provide oral and written feedback on his/her teaching performance. Project staff identifed additional competencies needed to accomplish

rural mainstream education and incorporated them into coursework, the pre-practicum seminar, and the practicum experience. These additional competencies included knowledge and skills such as:

--understanding the context of the rural school and its environment
--recognizing the unique features of serving pupils with disabilities in rural settings
--identifying best practices in rural education and rural special education
--identifying effective rural service delivery models for pupils with disabilities
--developing collaboration and consultation skills for working with rural educators, related service personnel, volunteers, and families
--using available rural school and community resources to enhance instruction
--developing personal survival skills for coping with the unique challenges of working in mainstream settings in rural areas

Project Components

Program Development and Delivery

Practicum Eligibility Criteria Modification. Project staff modified eligibility criteria for practicum students and supervisory personnel to implement the Mainstream Practicum Model:

1. eligibility criteria for practicum students:
   a. completion of all required coursework
   b. employment for at least one (1) year in a regular classroom with at least two (2) mainstreamed pupils in the area of specialization for which certification is sought for at least three (3) daily lesson periods;
   c. permission from school authorities for practicum to be conducted in the job setting and agreement to provide one (1) regular educator and one (1) special educator to provide on-site supervision of a minimum of one (1) hour every other week each;
   d. satisfactory performance in the pre-practicum mainstreaming seminar;
   e. attendance at the orientation and enrollment in the practicum course;
2. eligibility criteria for cooperating teachers:
   a. regular educator must:
      i. be certified in elementary or secondary education;
      ii. possess a Master's degree in some area of education or a related field;
      iii. have at least three (3) years of teaching experienced in a regular classroom with mainstreamed pupils with special needs;
   b. special educator must:
      i. be certified in the special education area of specialization;
      ii. possess a Master's degree in some area of education or a related field;
      iii. have at least three (3) tears of teaching experience in special education including consultation with regular educators for mainstreamed pupils;
   c. both cooperating teachers must attend the mainstream supervisor training session and practicum orientation; and
3. eligibility criteria for university supervisors:
   a. certification in one or more areas of special education specialization;
   b. completion of a Master's or doctoral degree in special education;
   c. at least three (3) years of teaching experience in special education including consultation with regular educators for mainstreamed pupils with special needs;
   d. at least one (1) year of prior supervisory experience;
   e. satisfactory completion of SPED 391 Collaborative Consultation; and
   f. attendance at the mainstream supervisor training session and orientation.

Practicum Procedures Redesign. Project staff redesigned all practicum procedures to implement the Mainstream Practicum Model and incorporate mainstream teaching competencies:

1. modification of application and eligibility review process to include criteria for the mainstream practicum model;

2. modification of orientation session to explain requirements and procedures associated with the mainstream practicum model; and
3. addition of a pre-practicum seminar to review strategies for mainstreaming and prepare students for meeting the mainstream competencies;
4. modification of the student evaluation and grading process to incorporate input and from both cooperating teachers as well as the university supervisor.

Practicum Materials Redesign. Project staff redesigned all practicum materials to implement the Mainstream Practicum Model and incorporate mainstream teaching competencies:

1. addition of mainstream practicum competencies eligibility criteria to Practicum Application and Eligibility Review Forms;
2. addition of mainstream practicum competencies and procedures for documenting them to Practicum Handbook;
3. addition of strategies for observing, coaching, critiquing, and evaluating mainstream teaching competencies to Supervisor Manual and Packets;
3. addition of information, resources, and activities related to mainstream teaching competencies and supervisory strategies to the Training Session Materials;
4. development of forms to assess mainstream teaching competencies and to evaluate the mainstream practicum model.

Delivery of Program Coursework. Department faculty have offered all required coursework at six (6) regional off-campus sites at least two (2) times during the project period, enabling students to complete all requirements to be eligible for enrollment in the practicum experience:

1. core courses (SPED 300, 301, 302, 303);
2. specialization courses (SPED 360, 362 in Mental Retardation; SPED 330, 332 in Learning Disabilities; SPED 340, 342 in Behavior Disorders); and
3. degree program courses (SPED 380, 382 and EDP 330).

Delivery of Practicum Experiences. Project staff have offered the Mainstream Practicum Model option in addition to full-time and on-the-job practicum options during each academic semester:

1. practicum experiences were conducted in the eastern half of the WVU service area in the Fall semester; and
2. practicum experiences were conducted in the western half of the WVU service area in the Spring semester.

Project Evaluation Plan

The WVU Dept.of Special Education employs a comprehensive, systematic evaluation plan based upon the Discrepancy Evaluation Model. The ongoing plan consists of measurement at regular intervals of student competency acquisition, student and staff satisfaction with program operation, and graduate performance on the job. Instruments and procedures designed specifically for the department's programs are used to collect data from a variety of sources: students, faculty, cooperating professionals, graduates, and employers. Data are used as input for decisions concerning development and modification of the departm,ent's graduate certification and degree programs. Within this model, program components are considered satisfactory if they meet the department's prespecified criterion of 75% effectiveness; components that fall below that criterion are reviewed by faculty to identify existing problems and potential solutions.

Formative Evaluation. Data were collected during all phases of project operation for formative evaluation purposes to determine modifications in program design and delivery based upon feedback from participants and project staff following the pilot phase and each operational year. These data were provided by participants through self-report questionnaires and focus group interviews and were used to refine operational procedures, measurement instruments, program content, and the service delivery system.

Summative Evaluation. Data collected from all operational semesters has been used for summative evaluation purposes to determine if the project was successful in meeting its goals, as well as whether it was a cost-efficient, workable alternative for practicum experiences in teacher training programs in special education. The following evaluation plan was implemented to assess the outcomes of the project at the summative stage:

1. Data on the effectiveness of the Mainstream Practicum Model was collected by means of survey questionnaires and participant interviews to determine the extent to which the model operated as intended, as well as how well it compared with the traditional practicum model. These data indicated that both students and supervisors were satisfied with the overall operation of the Mainstream Practicum Model, expressing concern only with the extent to which the orientation session prepared them for their responsibilities. Participants were unanimous in affirming the appropriateness of this as a practicum option for assessing competencies for certification in special education as well as a mechanism for promoting effective mianstreaming of students with special needs by regular educators. Several regular educator cooperating teachers reported that the mainstream competencies served as indicators against which they could measure their own performance and that they learned new strategies from observing the practicum student in his or her own classroom.

2. Data on the acquisition of mainstream teaching competencies was collected by determining the number and criterion levels of competencies validated during the practicum experience across all students to insure that every student demonstrated adequate mainstream teaching competencies upon completion of the practicum experience. These data indicated that nearly all practicum students received a rating of strong or weak on most of the mainstreaming competency indicators; a few students received a rating of weak on indicators related to accomplishing IEP goals, addressing pupil social needs, and promoting independence. Other data showed that the regular educator cooperating teachers rated practicum students high in mainstreaming across all success indicators: integration into the classroom, focused learning outcomes, respect for diversity and instructional delivery. Special educator cooperating teachers and supervisors, however, tended to express some concern about mainstreaming success related to pupil learning outcomes, although they rated all other indicators high.

3. Data on the appropriateness of supervision by cooperating teachers and university supervisors to promote mainstream teaching by practicum students was collected by means of review of practicum evaluation forms, self-evaluations, and evaluations by practicum students. These data indicated that the practicum students were pleased with the level of supervision and support from all personnel. The cooperating teachers (both regular and special educators) expressed satisfaction with their collaboration and the interface with university personnel. University supervisors, however, tended to question the role of the regular educator cooperating teacher and the meaningfulness of their contribution to the completion of practicum requirements.

4. Data on the impact of the project on teacher supply, quality, and retention was collected by monitoring WVU student records on number of participants certified, participant employment locations, and length of participant employment. These data indicated that 20 participants completed the program, with 16 participants obtaining certification in Learning Disabilities, 3 in Mental Retardation, and 1 in Behavior Disorders; 6 more participants are scheduled to complete requirements next year. Participants were evenly divided across grade levels, with 11 at the elementary level and 11 at the secondary level. project staff were disappointed in the response to the program, which was significantly lower than anticipated. Informal surveys of potential participants revealed that many teachers are reluctant to become more qualified in special education because they fear that administrators will use this as a rationale place more pupils with special needs in their classrooms.

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Program Integration. Project staff are currently involved in taking steps to integrate the components Mainstream Practicum Project into the ongoing program in special education. The model and procedures were used to provide practicum experiences to practicing regular educators in another federally funded project to develop skills for inclusion in teachers of mainstreamed students with learning disabilities during the 1997-1998 academic year. The mainstream practicum model has been added as an option to the existing array of graduate practicum experiences as outlined in the eligibility requirements, application form, and practicum handbook, and will be available to all students in the program beginning with the 1998-1999 academic year. Evaluation procedures for the project have been incorporated into the existing program evaluation plan to insure continuous and comprehensive monitoring and assessment of program operation and outcomes. Faculty also anticipate that the requirements of the mainstream practicum option and the procedures and forms for evaluating mainstream competencies that were developed through this project will be used in future years to structure new practicum models that may emerge as the roles and responsibilities of special educators change to accommodate the growing trend toward full inclusion of pupils with special needs.

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